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## **Historic Eleutherian College stands tall**

Lancaster, Ind., school educated all races and was home to anti-slavery society

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At the corner of Second and Main streets in Louisville, a Kentucky Historical Highway marker reminds anyone who pauses to read it of a grim and shameful part of the city's past:

"By the 1850s, Kentucky was annually exporting between 2,500 and 4,000 of its slaves downriver to the large plantations farther south. To prevent runaways, traders operating near the Ohio River kept slaves shackled together in pens when not being displayed to buyers. Slave traders were often social outcasts avoided by all but fellow traders."

The marker is on the site of these pens.

But about 50 miles north, in tiny Lancaster, Ind., a Hoosier State Highway marker commemorates a far brighter aspect of antebellum American history:

"Eleutherian College -- College developed in 1854 from Eleutherian Institute, founded 1848. Thomas Craven and anti-slavery advocates in the area created and supported the institution for education of students of all races and genders."

Lancaster, in Jefferson County northwest of Madison, was also the home of the Neil's Creek Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1839 with 82 members. And many of the students at the college (the name of which was from the Greek *eleuthera* meaning "freedom and equality") were runaway slaves who had made their way across the Ohio River from Louisville to Southern Indiana.

The main college building still stands, and the site is one of the gateways to the Underground Railroad along the driving tours of Indiana's Trails to Freedom.

And even though it's undergoing a major renovation, after many decades of neglect, a walk through the four-story building gives a visitor a pretty good idea of what learning here was like.

Sunlight streams through tall, broad windows. Remnants of chalkboards are still attached to classroom walls. And the chapel area of the college, complete with a balcony, has lively acoustics that would have ensured that every word uttered by a preacher or speaker was heard by the congregation or audience.

Jae Breitweiser, who has led the restoration of Eleutherian and oversees the Visitors Center/Museum just down the hill from the college, explains that the education there was to train "teachers and preachers." These professions were thought to be the ones that would have the most influence in bringing about social change, and subjects taught included Latin and modern languages.

The exhibits in the Visitors Center include information about the founders of the college and many of its students. Among the mixed-race individuals educated at Eleutherian were Thomas Jefferson's grandchildren and Theodore Johnson, the son of Richard M. Johnson (vice president of the United States under Martin Van Buren), whose mother had been a slave.

The mission of the college was more than realized by many of its graduates, including the Rev. Moses Broyles, who left Maryland at age 8 when he was purchased by a Paducah, Ky., landowner.

Broyles eventually managed to buy his freedom and make his way to Eleutherian. A desk he made for himself while at the college is the centerpiece of the Visitors Center/Museum.

After he graduated, Broyles went on to found 28 churches in Indiana, all of which had schools associated with them modeled on Eleutherian College.